

## JOINT PRESS RELEASE

### Key food chain partners to launch sustainability roundtable

**Major stakeholders in the European food and drink chain set up a roundtable to promote environmental sustainability.**

The Roundtable will constitute a major food sector-wide contribution to the EU's ambitions in the field of Sustainable Consumption and Production, bringing together farmers and their suppliers, agricultural traders, food and drink producers, packaging suppliers, recovery organisations and civil society representatives, and will be supported by the UN Environment Programme and the European Environment Agency.

Its outstanding features are its clear-cut focus on food and drink products and the involvement of all major food value chain players on an equal footing. The Roundtable will add significant value to initiatives outlined in the European Commission's 2008 Action Plan.<sup>1</sup>

The first priority of the "European Food SCP Roundtable" will be to facilitate agreement on uniform and scientifically reliable environmental assessment methodologies for food products.

"European consumers increasingly want to be sure that the food they buy and consume is not only safe, healthy, nutritious and affordable, but that it also meets the highest levels of environmental sustainability", says Jean Martin, President of CIAA.

"We want to put an end to consumers seeing inconsistent environmental information on products. Our new cooperation will bring together existing initiatives from across the food chain, promote their foundation on sound scientific evidence and translate into real progress in moving towards a coherent approach across the EU." stresses Pekka Pesonen, Secretary-General of Copa-Cogeca.

In addition to the major food chain organisations<sup>2</sup>, the Roundtable looks to cooperate closely with all relevant European Commission services. It will be supported by the European Environment Agency and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), ensuring alignment with the European and global sustainable consumption and production agenda. Also consumer organisations and retailers have been invited to participate.

"In gathering the expertise of the entire food value chain, the Roundtable will constitute a major sector-specific reference point also for the upcoming Retail Forum", adds Senator Feargal Quinn, President of EuroCommerce. Exchange of information between the two initiatives will pool expertise, favour consistency and avoid duplication.

Parallel to environmental assessment methods, the Roundtable will examine key sustainability challenges along the food value chain (e.g. climate change, water conservation, resource efficiency and waste reduction) and develop adequate strategies to address them.

The Food SCP Roundtable will be formally launched in a public stakeholder event in April 2009. Participation is open to all food chain partners and other relevant stakeholders, including NGOs, with pertinent expertise and who are committed to engage themselves actively towards the objectives of the Roundtable.

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<sup>1</sup> Commission Communication on the Sustainable Consumption and Production and Sustainable Industrial Policy Action Plan, 16 July 2008

<sup>2</sup> See list on page 2

## Current participants in the European Food SCP Roundtable

Umbrella organisations participating in the Roundtable currently include (in alphabetic order):

CELCAA	European Liaison Committee of Agricultural and Agro-Food Trade
CIAA	Confederation of the Food and Drink Industry in the EU
COPA-COGECA	European Farmers and European Agri-cooperatives
EFMA	European Fertilizer Manufacturers Association
EUROPEN	European Organization for Packaging and the Environment
FEFAC	European Feed Manufacturers Federation
IFAH-Europe	International Federation of Animal Health
PRO EUROPE	Packaging Recovery Organisation Europe

The Roundtable is also open to food-related sector organisations.

Supportive organisations currently include:

EEA	European Environment Agency
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme

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## **Establishment of the European Food SCP Roundtable**

### **Questions & Answers**

#### **Why a Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) Roundtable on food?**

Food and drink products play a fundamental role in daily life. Every day, some 500 million EU citizens rely on high quality food for their nutrition, health and wellbeing. Food and drink products relate to their lifestyle and reflect their cultural identity.

At the same time, the production and consumption of food and drink products (from farm to fork and end-of-life) also triggers environmental implications, like for other products. The European food chain shares the responsibility and commitment to ensure that production and consumption of food not only meet consumers' needs for food safety, nutrition, health, affordability and product choice and contribute to the generation of economic growth, but that they are also environmentally sustainable, respecting the carrying capacity of the Earth's ecosystems in the long term.

While the concept of SCP generally applies to all products sold and bought on the market, food and drink products are different. Their specificities in terms of health, nutrition, wellbeing, cultural identity and lifestyle make them incomparable to any other product. It is for that reason that a dedicated Roundtable is being established to properly address the specific sustainability implications of the production and consumption of food and drink products.

#### **What is Sustainable Consumption and Production about?**

In the food and drink sector, SCP is about the supply and demand of food and how they can be managed in a sustainable way. Both are intrinsically linked.

Food and drink supply chain members (including farmers and their suppliers, food manufacturers, packaging producers, transport and logistics operators and retailers) share the responsibility to produce and supply food in the most environmentally sustainable way. The dissemination of existing best practice and technology at all stages of the food chain as well as technological development can be expected to deliver significant further environmental improvements in areas such as energy, water and resources efficiency, waste and greenhouse gas reduction.

Consumers, on the other hand, create their own environmental impact through the way they transport, store and prepare food, how much waste they generate, and how they dispose of it. They also indirectly affect upstream environmental impacts through their purchasing decisions. Scientifically reliable and understandable environmental information can help consumers consider the wider sustainability implications of their purchasing decisions and behaviour.

#### **Why will the Roundtable address methodologies as key priority?**

The European food chain is committed to helping consumers make informed choices by providing them with accurate and understandable information on relevant product characteristics, including environmental performance.

More recently, a number of food chain players have introduced a growing variety of different environmental product information tools, including different labels, statements, product declarations and other means addressing specific environmental aspects of a product (e.g. its carbon footprint, agricultural practices, transport mode, transport distance, packaging weight, recyclability, biodegradability, and others). These initiatives are characterised by a high degree of diversity, assessing different environmental impacts with different methodologies.

This situation can only confuse consumers or even mislead them, especially when information provided is overly simplified, scientifically unreliable or based on inconsistent methodologies in different Member States. Not only will this inevitably undermine consumer trust in any type of product-related information and lead to accusations of green washing, but also run counter to the objective of contributing to real environmental improvement.

The whole concept of SCP therefore stands and falls with scientifically robust and uniform environmental product assessment methodologies within the EU.

### **Why involve the whole food chain?**

The successful management of Sustainable Consumption and Production in the food sector critically depends on the expertise held by the various food value chain partners in continuously improving their sustainability performance. No individual player can tell the full story on this very complex issue. Cooperation is essential to arrive at a common understanding of environmental causes and effects along the life-cycle and to design well coordinated strategies and measures to address them.

This format reflects the participants' commitment to the concept of shared responsibility for the environmental management of the food chain. It will support the development of coherent sustainability measures that enjoy the broad support of all relevant value chain players and that take a holistic approach to tackling environmental challenges rather than looking at individual impact areas in isolation. This coordinated approach, allowing all actors to cooperate on an equal footing, will also avoid shifting environmental burdens from one stage in the life cycle to another.

### **Why a Roundtable at EU level?**

In order to provide consumers with comparable environmental information across the EU, maximum attention must be paid to the development of EU-wide product assessment methodologies. A number of interesting initiatives have already been launched at national level (e.g. in France, UK, Belgium, Germany). However, within a common EU market for both consumers and producers it is necessary to reach agreement on harmonised assessment methodologies at the EU level, with the support of all concerned stakeholders (business operators, public authorities, consumers, science, standardization bodies, NGOs, IGOs). The Food SCP Roundtable aims to provide the relevant framework to accomplish this task for food and drink products specifically and in line with international standards on environmental product assessment.

### **What pillars of sustainability will be addressed?**

The concept of "sustainability" requires the integration of its three pillars – environmental, social and economic – in a holistic manner. For reasons of manageability, and in line with the scope of the European Commission's 2008 Action Plan, the Food SCP Roundtable will take the environmental pillar of sustainability as its declared starting and focus point. Indeed, given the immense complexities of environmental implications arising along the food value chain and the multitude of actors involved in this process, a Food SCP Roundtable focussing specifically on environmental sustainability already constitutes a highly ambitious endeavour.

However, the work of the Roundtable will be conducted in full awareness of the wider dimensions of sustainability. A coherent concept of sustainability must also consider other essential product characteristics such as quality, safety, health, nutrition, affordability, consumer acceptance and other societal concerns, which are essential for food and drink products. The wide-ranging expertise held by participating food chain players in managing the social, economic and environmental aspects of sustainability will ensure that the Roundtable's environmental priorities will not be addressed in isolation.

### **Who can participate in the Roundtable?**

Participation is open but conditional on relevant expertise, active engagement, and commitment to the objectives of the Roundtable. Participants must be recognized as performing an activity directly relevant to the food value chain, the assessment and/or management of its environmental implications and/or the communication of food and drink products' performance, including their environmental performance, to consumers. For further information regarding participation in the Roundtable, please contact Ms Catherine Stadion, CIAA Secretariat (e-mail: [c.stadion@ciao.eu](mailto:c.stadion@ciao.eu)).

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